



AETC News Clips

Columbus AFB, Miss.



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Tourism officials mull 'packaging' approaches

By Earl Descant
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Waiters and waitresses, hotel desk clerks and housekeepers can do as much to expand tourism once visitors are in town as anyone but need to be trained in the tools of the trade.

And by "thinking out of the box" and perfecting its own niches, Columbus can expand its tourism base, those involved in the industry said Tuesday.

For example, "culinary tourism," one of the fastest-growing markets, "mystery tours," another growing niche in the industry, and "spouse tours," yet another small but expanding segment, all could attract more groups to the area when packaged with existing and proposed attractions, James Tsismanakis, the new director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau said during one of the new "town-hall" meetings he's started to brainstorm ideas.

"The idea of utilizing The W's culinary school to promote tourism or how do we

focus on our unique restaurants. These are things we could think about," said Tsismanakis, referring to the growing trend of restaurants placing premium tables in the kitchen and the growing popularity of cooking demonstrations.

Tsismanakis stressed the need to think creatively about the various tourism markets and explore the different ways

"This is a great way to get people in and to sell your destination."

James Tsismanakis
Columbus Convention and Visitors Bureau Director

Columbus might capitalize on attracting more groups.

But culinary tourism, like bird-watching tours, home tours and golf tours are part of the larger concept of "packaging," said Tsismanakis, who just returned from the Destination Marketing Association International con-

ference in San Diego.

"Packaging" is the new buzzword," he said.

Even surprises get planned, scheduled and carefully conceived, Tsismanakis added, boasting of another burgeoning tourism market, the mystery tour. Generally these are designed as motorcoach tours, and the guests have little or no idea what the organizers have planned.

"Mystery tours are really big right now," said Tsismanakis. "This is a great way to get people in and to sell your destination."

Other structured tours have followed suit, coining their own buzzwords along the way, such as "Girlfriend Getaways," a girls-only-geared-weekend and "Togetherness Travel," where friends and neighbors put the brakes on their collectively busy lives and take a trip together.

"Another thing to think about, is 'spouse tourism,'" offered Jack White, one of the organizers of the Tennessee Williams Tribute Weekend.

And to better serve the tourists already here, the CVB would like to begin working with local restaurants and hotels to train servers, front desk personnel and housekeepers about the different attractions Columbus offers



'Packaging' tourism

Officials are thinking over and talking about ways to market Columbus to niche groups.

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